

## REFUGEE INFLUX FROM MYANMAR – INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

NEWS: Since February 2021, Myanmar has witnessed a military coup, triggering a civil war and ethnic conflicts.

- Over **40,000 refugees** have crossed into **Mizoram**, especially from the **Chin State of Myanmar**, with recent influxes seen in **Champhai** district.
- The latest wave (July 2025) brought **~4,000 more refugees** due to clashes between two anti-junta armed groups:
  - Chin National Defence Force (CNDF)
  - Chinland Defence Force-Hualngohm (CDF-H)

## WHAT'S IN THE NEWS?

### Why Mizoram is a Key Refuge Destination

- **Ethnic Affinity:**  
The **Chin people of Myanmar** share close ethnic, cultural, and linguistic ties with the **Mizo community**. Both belong to the broader Zo ethnic group, fostering natural solidarity.
- **Geographic Proximity:**  
**Mizoram shares a long, porous border with Chin State (Myanmar)**. This geographical closeness makes it a logical entry point for fleeing civilians during periods of conflict.
- **Humanitarian Tradition:**  
**Mizoram has a history of sheltering persecuted ethnic groups**, including those from **Bangladesh (Chakmas), Myanmar (Chins), and Manipur (Kuki-Zos)**. Its civil society is known for its welcoming stance.

### Timeline of Refugee Movements and Policy Evolution

- **1968–2004: Free Movement Regime (FMR):**  
Allowed tribal communities along the India–Myanmar border to travel up to **40 km without visa**; later reduced to **16 km**.
- **2016:**  
The FMR was **regulated and further restricted** to address security and immigration concerns.
- **2024:**  
The **Ministry of Home Affairs (MHA) suspended FMR**, citing **national security risks and illegal migration**.

## Post-2021 Influx and Refugee Spread

- **Triggering Event:**  
Following Myanmar's **military coup in 2021**, conflict escalated. The **Chin National Army lost control** to pro-junta forces, leading to a **civilian exodus**.
- **Recent Figures (as of July 6, 2025):**
  - Around **3,890 Myanmar nationals** are recorded in **Zokhawthar** town, Champhai district.
  - Refugees are spread across **Zokhawthar, Khawmawi, and Saisihnuam** regions in Mizoram.
  - Total post-coup refugees in Mizoram are estimated at **~40,000**.

## Centre-State Tensions: Diverging Positions

Aspect	Mizoram Government	Central Government (MHA)
Stance	Pro-refugee (humanitarian, ethnic solidarity)	Restrictive (national security focus)
Actions	Provides housing, cash relief, and refuses to evict refugees	Allocated ₹28 crore but warned against further intake
Conflict	Mizoram continues to host refugees, ignoring Centre's eviction orders	MHA accused state of demographic alteration and law violations

## Role of Civil Society in Refugee Management

- **Key Actors:**  
Organisations such as the **Young Mizo Association (YMA)**, **churches**, and **student unions** have played a **central role in supporting refugees**.
- **Support Mechanisms:**  
Relief camps, food distribution, education access, and housing are **largely managed through local donations and voluntary efforts**, with minimal central involvement.

## Legal and Administrative Challenges

- **No Refugee Law in India:**  
India is **not a signatory** to the **1951 UN Refugee Convention** or the **1967 Protocol**, and there is **no dedicated refugee law**.

- **Current Framework:**  
Refugees are treated under the **Foreigners Act, 1946**, which does **not distinguish between refugees and illegal migrants** — causing legal ambiguity.
- **Limited State Jurisdiction:**  
While states like Mizoram manage ground-level support, **migration and border management fall under MHA**, limiting state autonomy.

## Ground-Level Realities in Mizoram

- **Refugee Hubs:**  
Border areas such as **Champhai and Zokhawthar** are the main entry and settlement zones.
- **Living Conditions:**
  - Most refugees stay in **informal shelters** with **limited access to healthcare and employment**.
  - **Some school access** has been permitted, especially for children.
  - Heavy **dependency on aid** and voluntary donations for sustenance.
- **Security Risks:**
  - Intelligence inputs warn of **armed group infiltration** among refugees.
  - **Border militarisation and fencing** may affect India–Myanmar diplomatic ties.

## Strategic and Policy Implications

### A. Domestic Implications

- Highlights the **federal strain** between Centre and border states over **refugee management and security responsibility**.
- Underscores the **need for a national refugee law** to guide uniform response while protecting humanitarian values.

### B. Regional Implications

- **Policy inconsistency along the eastern border** may weaken India's diplomatic standing, especially if Myanmar's junta retaliates diplomatically.
- Rising influxes from **Bangladesh (Rohingyas), Myanmar (Chins), and Manipur (Kuki-Zos)** reflect deepening **instability in India's eastern neighbourhood**.

## Key Policy Recommendations

- **Draft a National Refugee Law:**
  - Clearly define who is a refugee.
  - Provide legal rights, responsibilities, and protection mechanisms.
  - Establish protocols for refugee registration and status determination.
- **Institutional Coordination:**
  - Set up **joint task forces** between MHA and northeastern states for cooperative refugee governance.
- **Humanitarian FMR-lite Mechanism:**
  - Allow controlled, tech-monitored cross-border movement for ethnic kin during humanitarian crises.
- **Leverage International Aid:**
  - Partner with **UNHCR, ASEAN**, and other international bodies for **technical and financial assistance**, without compromising sovereignty.
- **Strengthen Border State Capacities:**
  - Invest in **shelter infrastructure, healthcare, digital ID systems, and livelihood support** for both refugees and host communities.

### Key Statistics (as of July 2025)

Indicator	Value
Total refugees in Mizoram (post-2021 coup)	~40,000
New influx in July 2025 alone	~4,000
Myanmar nationals in Zokhawthar	3,890
Government (Central) relief aid	₹28 crore
Official camps with formal engagement (FGDs) Very few – mostly community-led	

Source: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/nearly-150000-rohingya-fled-from-myanmar-to-bangladesh-in-18-months-united-nations-refugee-agency/article69800142.ece>